



Paola Westbeek *discovers*
the great wines of Burgundy's
Côte Chalonnaise.

To the wine connoisseur, the region of Burgundy is synonymous with the Côte d'Or. Often referred to as the 'golden slope', the east-facing escarpment produces some of the world's most prestigious wines. Think of big names such as Gevrey-Chambertin and Puligny-Montrachet. These are the giants that have made the region famous.

Panoramic drives through the vineyards, plenty of tastings and visits to interesting restaurants are guaranteed.

A bottle bearing such a name is of course not within everyone's budget, but if you head further south, you will find the Côte Chalonnaise – an area that is similar to the Côte d'Or yet produces wines that are significantly more affordable and certainly worth discovering.



Nestled between the Côte de Beaune to the north and the Mâconnais to the south, the Côte Chalonnaise boasts hills of rolling vineyards that intermingle with orchards, meadows and woods. Its vines were planted by the monks of Cluny more than a thousand years ago and today, they stretch out over around 25 kilometres and are found at altitudes between 220 and 400m. The two most important grape varieties produced on the region's clay-limestone soils are pinot noir (for red wines) and chardonnay (for white wines). The exception is the Bouzeron appellation,

TRAVEL & LEISURE



Château de Bouzeron

which produces mainly white wines made almost exclusively from the Aligoté grape.

So why not plan a trip to the area and discover for yourself the appellations of this relatively underestimated wine district: panoramic drives through the vineyards, plenty of tastings and visits to interesting restaurants are guaranteed.

BOUZERON

Following the Route des Grands Vins, your journey through the five main appellations of the Côte Chalonnaise begins in the tiny village of Bouzeron, famous for its pale golden Aligoté wines. These 'mineral' whites with hints of citrus and white flowers are very refreshing though they might lack fruit and can be slightly acidic. This makes them the perfect choice for the local apéritif known as Kir (made with four parts Aligoté and one part Crème de Cassis). Aligoté wines are best paired with seafood (especially oysters), but they are also delicious with poultry in a cream sauce or salads with goat cheese. A classic combination is Aligoté with the regional speciality of parsleyed ham (jambon persillé). When visiting Bouzeron, gourmands will want to stop at Restaurant Le Bouzeron where the chef Ludovic prepares classic French dishes with the finest seasonal products. Not to be missed are their starters with foie gras served in three different ways: as a mousse, pan-fried or in a terrine.

RULLY

Heading towards the D981, the next appellation is Rully which produces more whites than reds and has 23 vineyards that are 'Premiers Crus'. When aged, the crisp, polished whites acquire soft hints of honey and dried fruits. They are lively, well-rounded wines that go well with veal and delicate fish dishes. In their youth, the reds tend to have rather firm tannins that are best balanced with creamy dishes (risottos, offal or rich pastas). Besides its wines, Rully has been the

centre for sparkling Crémants (an affordable alternative to champagne) since the 19th Century.

But there's more to Rully than wine. The majestic Château de Rully dating back to the 12th Century, is perched on a hill overlooking the vineyards and is one of the town's main monuments. Tours of the castle and wine tastings can be arranged by prior appointment. Hungry? Many restaurants in the region offer a reasonably priced menu du jour. A great choice is Restaurant Le Vendangerot, where for only €17 you can enjoy a meal that includes cheese and a dessert.

MERCUREY

Continuing south on the D981, follow the signs to the next appellation: Mercurey. On your way, you'll come across many scenic views where winding roads cut through vineyards and lead to village churches far in the distance. Upon entering Mercurey, you will definitely want to make a few stops on the Grande Rue. The street is home to various wineries where you can enjoy tastings and talk to passionate growers who have made wine their life's quest. Two highly recommended choices are Le Clos Antonin Rodet and the Caveau Divin Mercurey, where 35 estates are collectively represented.

Mercurey, the most important appellation by far, has 32 Premiers Crus vineyards spread over roughly 650 hectares. It is the district's largest volume producer. In fact, the Côte Chalonnaise was once called the 'Région de Mercurey'. The appellation is known for its deep ruby reds that when aged develop hints of cocoa and tobacco. Keep them for five to eight years and enjoy the rich, fleshy wines with Charolais steaks, duck confit and potato gratins.

GIVRY

Just a few kilometres further on, you'll find the village of Givry, which together with Dracy-le-Fort and



Hotel de ville Givry



Restaurant Le Vendangerot

Jambles, is home to 26 Premiers Crus vineyards. The appellation produces balanced whites but is mostly known for its reds. Young reds tend to be quite tannic, so keep them for a minimum of three to five years. They are a fine choice for terrines and pâtés, but they are also wonderful with the region's Bresse poultry or strong cheeses (reblochon). During your visit to Givry, stop at the Hôtel de Ville (one of France's most beautiful town halls built in the 18th Century as a monumental port) and La Halle Ronde (a circular grain market situated in the centre of town that dates back to 1825-1830).

MONTAGNY

The final destination of your wine tour of the Côte Chalonnaise is Montagny. The appellation spans four villages: Montagny, Buxy, Saint-Vallerin and Jully-les-Buxy. White wines are solely produced and the appellation has the highest concentration of Premiers Crus vineyards – namely, 49. The whites are delicately floral, fresh, and with their brilliance, perfect partners for aromatic dishes such as fish tagines, paella or Asian fare. Well worth a visit is the friendly village of Buxy, which has a superb restaurant (Aux Années Vins), a winemaker's museum and a cooperative cave offering fine regional wines.

Although the Côte Chalonnaise does not boast any Grand Cru appellations or enjoy the prestige of the Côte-d'Or, its wines offer great pleasures to those who are unafraid to look just a little farther afield. Whether it be wine, gastronomy or simply enjoying the unspoilt French countryside, the Côte Chalonnaise delights the senses in a multitude of ways. It's perfect for a spring getaway. After all, from Brussels you're just six hours away from one of France's most beautiful (and affordable) wine producing districts. ■



WHERE TO STAY

- **Hotel Le Dracy:** in the countryside (yet close to the motorway) between Givry and the lively city of Chalon-sur-Saône. Its restaurant (*La Garenne*) serves great seasonal meals. 4 rue du Pressoir, 71640 (Dracy-le-Fort), www.hotelledracy.com
- **Moulin Madame:** 5km from Chalon-sur-Saône. The stone house dating from the 14th Century features five bed-and-breakfast rooms and two gîtes. A table d'hôtes made with home-grown organic produce is also served. Rue du Moulin Madame, 71640 (Givry), www.moulinmadame.com
- **Moulin de la Canne:** just outside the tiny village of Cersot and close to Buxy, the beautifully restored water mill features plenty of French charm and is a perfect place to stay for families or small groups. Moulin de la Canne, 71390 (Cersot) www.moulindelacanne.nl

PLACES MENTIONED

- **Restaurant Le Bouzeron:** 2 rue de la Maire, 71150 (Bouzeron), www.restaurant-lebouzeron.com
- **Château de Rully:** 2 Hameau du Château, 71150 (Rully), www.chateauderully.com
- **Restaurant Le Vendangerot:** 6 place Sainte Marie, 71150 (Rully), www.vendangerot.fr
- **Le Clos Antonin Rodet:** 55 Grande Rue, 71640 (Mercurey), www.rodet.com
- **Caveau Divin Mercurey:** Place Genappe, 101 Grande Rue, 71640 (Mercurey), www.mercurey.com
- **Restaurant Aux Années Vins:** 2 grande rue, 71390 (Buxy), www.aux-annees-vins.com
- **Musée du Vigneron:** Rue de la Gare, 71390 (Buxy), www.buxy-tourisme.fr
- **Cave des Vignerons de Buxy:** Les Vignes de la Croix, 71390 (Buxy), www.vigneronsdebuxy.fr

Burgundy beaus



Restaurant Bouzeron



Château de Rully



Le Clos Antonin Rodet
55 Grande Rue, 71640
Mercurey, Côte Chalonnaise
www.rodet.com



Mercurey